COPPER COINAGE

OF THE

EARL OF STIRLING.

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THE

COPPER COINAGE

OF THE

EARL OF STIRLING.

1632.

BY THE

REV. EDMUND F. SLAFTER, A. M.,
MEMBER OF THE BOSTON NUMISMATIC SOCIETY, ETC.

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THE COPPER COINAGE

OF THE

EARL OF STIRLING.

THE coining of copper in England, at a very early period, was farmed out to private persons under a royal grant or charter. If we are rightly informed, this coinage is still conducted in that country in a somewhat similar manner. The coining of small pieces by the Earl of Stirling was in some sense, as will appear in the sequel, a private enterprise, authorized nevertheless by royal mandate and limited by the usual restrictions.

But before entering upon the historical account of that coinage, as proposed in this paper, it will be necessary for the better understanding of the subject to pause in the outset, and answer the inquiry, which the numismatic student has a right to make, for some general outline of the life and character of the Earl of Stirling. Our statement shall be as brief and compact as possible.

The Earl of Stirling was a Scotch nobleman, born in 1580, at Menstrie, an unimportant hamlet a few miles east of Stirling, of which his father was the fifth laird or baron. The family name was Alexander, and, as the earl came to the peerage late in life, he is more familiarly known in history as Sir William Alexander.

He early developed scholarly tastes, and to a wide familiarity with the Greek and Latin languages, he added a knowledge of the more important

European tongues, as the French, Italian, and Spanish. After spending some time in foreign travel, at the age of twenty-three he attracted the attention of the literary world by the publication of a small volume of poetry, and volumes continued to appear from his pen almost yearly for more than a decade. He was the most voluminous Scotch poet of his period, and one of the first who discarded the rough dialect of Scotland for the more highly cultivated and refined English.

His tastes and learning and other attractive qualities made him a great favorite of James I., as likewise of his successor, the unfortunate Charles.

By the royal favor he was advanced to many important official stations, and among others was appointed Master of Requests for Scotland, in which office it became his duty to see that all Scottish petitions were suitable in matter and couched in proper language, before they were brought to the ear of the sovereign. He was likewise for many years Secretary of State for Scotland; in this office he was responsible for the legality of all documents relating to Scotland, which were to pass under either the privy or the great seal.

It will be seen that in the former office he was the adviser of the people, and in the latter the counsellor of the king.

As early as 1620 he became actively interested in American colonization. His influence at court rendered it not difficult for him to obtain all the privileges, in any enterprise of this sort, which the royal bounty could bestow. He accordingly obtained a charter, under the great seal, of what he called New Scotland, a vast domain embracing the present Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, and the territory lying immediately north of the last named province, and south of the river St. Lawrence. At a later period, when the French were expelled, in 1628, for a short time from Canada, then known as New France, he obtained another charter, covering a belt of land three hundred miles wide, lying on both sides of the St. Lawrence, and extending from its mouth to the Pacific Ocean. And lastly, he received a grant from the Coun-

cil for New England, of which he was a member, of Long Island, and a part of the present State of Maine.

He made several attempts to plant colonies in his New Scotland. In 1628 he established a Scotch settlement at Annapolis, in Nova Scotia, but after three or four years this colony, greatly to his disappointment, was removed, agreeably to the terms of a treaty entered into by Charles I. with the King of France. In 1639 he sent an agent to Boston, to encourage settlements on Long Island, and many of the early planters on the eastern part of the island obtained the title to their lands from the Earl of Stirling.

He was elevated to the Scottish peerage in 1630, as Viscount of Stirling, and in 1633 was advanced to the Earldom of Stirling. He died in London in February, 1641.

While there is much in the history and character of this nobleman attractive to the general reader, that part of his career connected with American colonization will always be studied with a special interest on this side of the Atlantic.

From this brief outline we shall not fail to see that he was a man of extraordinary energy and enterprise, and that he possessed a great personal influence, certainly in regard to Scottish affairs, at the court of Charles I.

Near the beginning of the year 1631, a proposition was made from Scotland, favored by the Earl of Stirling if not originating with him, that small copper coins should be struck for circulation in that kingdom; and it was especially urged on account of the scarcity of money at that time, and the great convenience of small coin for the poor, and for the payment of small sums.

The petition of the Scots was favorably entertained by the King and the Privy Council, and the requisite order having been issued, Charles addressed a note, on the 30th of June, 1631, to Nicholas Briot, directing him to prepare the dies and other instruments necessary for coining copper farthings, and to send them, under the direction of the Earl of Stirling, to the royal Mint at Edinburgh, and to repair thither himself to establish and superintend the works.

Nicholas Briot, to whom this order was given, was at that time the chief graver of coins and medals in England, having held the same office in France. He was esteemed the most distinguished artist of his time in this department. He left France in 1628 in disgust, and repaired to England, where he was cordially received, and where his skill was duly appreciated. He was thereupon immediately advanced to the high position to which we have referred. We are informed by Martin Folkes that he was the first who exhibited in Britain the *specimen* of a piece with letters upon the edge. This was a medal in gold, struck on the occasion of the King's coronation at Edinburgh, on the 18th June, 1633.

On the edge of the medal the following inscription was "most elegantly impressed": —

EX . AVRO . VT . IN . SCOTIA . REPERITVR . BRIOT . FECIT . EDINBVRGI . 1633.

On the 10th of July, 1631, the King directed the Treasurer of Scotland to pay over to the Earl of Stirling, in acknowlegdment of the good and faithful service rendered by him, the royalty, or what properly belonged to the king, in the coinage of the copper coins.

On the 13th of December following, the King, in a note to the Privy Council of Scotland, gave directions that the coins to be issued should be in three different pieces, specifying the weight and title of each; and he also laid down the mottoes and devices which they were to bear. The original project of coining farthings was abandoned, on the ground that coins of the same denomination, but varying in weight and value, would be more "convenient for exchange and reckoning," in which we seem to see the germ of the decimal system, but which has remained latent in Great Britain even down to the present day. The Council were directed to take such order in regard to the change of the weight of the pieces, as they might think fit, or as the necessities of the country should require.

The royalty on these coins was granted by the King to the Earl of Stir-

ling, for the space of nine years, and longer if necessary, in payment of a precept for 6,000 pounds sterling granted to him by James I., and another of 10,000 pounds by Charles I., upon very good considerations.

The precept for 10,000 pounds sterling granted by Charles, was in remuneration for losses sustained in the removal of the Scotch colony, already referred to, planted by the Earl in 1628, on the present site of Annapolis in Nova Scotia. It is interesting to the student of American history to observe, that this coinage is thus intimately connected with the public recognition of the great indebtedness of the Scots to the enterprise of Stirling in attempting an American colony, two years before Winthrop founded the town of Boston, the present metropolis of New England, and when the Episcopal clergyman, the Rev. William Blaxton, was the sole proprietor as well as the sole inhabitant of the peninsula of Shawmut.

Authority was at first given for the coining of 1,500 stone-weight. After the work had been in progress two years, this amount having been apparently nearly exhausted, authority was given for 6,000 stone-weight in addition, and as much more as should be needed to discharge the royal indebtedness, issuing from year to year about the same quantity as during the first two, until the expiration of his patent at the end of nine years.

Whether all or the bulk of the 16,000 pounds sterling due to the Earl was finally discharged by this enterprise, history is silent.

The work was commenced in 1632, but we have no complete evidence as to when it terminated, or the exact quantity of coin struck. We shall refer to these two points, however, in the sequel.

No treatise upon numismatics, either Scotch or English, with which we are acquainted, has given any account of the Earl of Stirling's connection with this coinage. It is, however, proper to add that this omission is not remarkable, since the contractors for the coining of copper are not usually mentioned by writers on this subject, except in an incidental way. We have seen several engraved representations of these coins in illustrated works, but in no case identified as of the Stirling coinage.

Mr. Henry F. Brown of the Numismatic Society of Liverpool, England, very kindly forwarded to the writer, by mail, in 1872, through the Secretary of that Society, Mr. Heywood Chapman, several of the small copper coins of Scotland, of the period of Charles I., belonging to his private collection. Two of them we were able to identify as of the Stirling coinage. For the accurate engravings of them, which we here present, we are indebted to the courtesy of the Prince Society, at whose expense they were made to illustrate a brief notice of this coinage in a memoir of the Earl, prepared by the present writer, and recently published by that Society, under the title "Sir William Alexander and American Colonization." The original drawings are from the delicate and skilful pencil of Miss Louise M. Hill, of Boston.

The devices and mottoes ordered by the King in a communication to the Privy Council of Scotland, December 13, 1631, were as follows: —

On one side a figure to indicate the value, under an imperial crown, with the royal inscription.

On the other the thistle with the motto, —

NEMO.ME.IMPUNE.LACESSET.

The coins were to be of three denominations. One weighing thirty-two grains, another weighing sixteen grains, and a third weighing eight grains; the latter, the King adds, "being the weight formerlie allowed by yow to the farthings."

The smaller of Mr. Brown's coins, above represented, weighs exactly eight grains, and the II under the imperial crown indicates its value to be two farthings. The larger weighs precisely thirty-two grains, and the value is indicated to be two pennies, or four times that of the smallest coin.

The reader will observe that they conform in type and weight strictly to the King's direction, and their identity, as of the Stirling coinage, could hardly be more completely established, although the value enstamped upon them appears to be but half that originally intended.

It will here be proper to remark that when the investigation for the purpose of identifying the Stirling coinage was in progress in 1872, and a correspondence with the officers of the Liverpool Numismatic Society was solicited and cordially granted, Mr. William S. Appleton, the Secretary of the Boston Numismatic Society, was absent in Europe, and his rich collection was not accessible at that time, as it usually is for all historical purposes. On Mr. Appleton's return, he at once placed in the hands of the writer two specimens of the Stirling coins of exactly the same type as those belonging to Mr. Brown's private collection, already described. Both of them were found to be somewhat heavier than the royal license required, the larger weighing thirty-seven grains instead of thirty-two, and the smaller weighing nine grains instead of eight. At that early period little care was taken to secure exactness, the chief concern being that they should not fall below the required weight, and the excess in this case was, undoubtedly, accidental. The smaller one is in fine preservation, scarcely less perfect than when it came from the mint, abbreviated by the occasional suppression of a letter, or by causing two to occupy the same space, one being struck over another in several instances.

Of the intermediate coin, weighing sixteen grains, ordered to be struck we have seen no specimen, nor any engraved illustration of it, in any work which we have examined relating to the coinage of Scotland.

The Stirling coins were undoubtedly struck at the old Scotch mint, or *Cunyie House*, still standing in the little court at the foot of Gray's Close, in Edinburgh, where are also the more spacious buildings in which were the offices of the Scottish mint before the Union, but now for a long time appropriated to other uses.

In the common parlance of the people they were called Turners, from Tournois, a term originally applied by the French to coins struck at *Tours*.

For several years the Earl of Stirling's coins appear to have been acceptable to the people of Scotland, and were circulated throughout the kingdom, nearly to the exclusion of other small coins. But at length circumstances arose which developed serious objections to them, the popular indignation was aroused, and they were denounced with acrimony and bitterness.

While the weight was apparently precisely that established by the government, and in this respect there was no violation of law, a change had nevertheless been introduced, which could not be easily reconciled with the habits, customs, and associations of the people.

The farthing no longer found its place in the coinage, and a piece of the same weight as the farthing was legalized to pass as two farthings, and the change extended, in the same ratio, to all the pieces issued. Whether the commercial value of the material had increased in the same proportion, so as to render the change necessary, it is not easy, at this distance of time, to determine; perhaps it had, and perhaps it had not. But however this may have been, the change was inconvenient and disagreeable; it interfered with old associations, and caused a visible ripple in the small currents of trade. Even under the most popular government and in the most peaceful times, a change in the nomenclature of the coinage, or moneys of account, especially if it break in upon associated values, inevitably meets with resistance, and is submitted to only with hesitation and reluctance. Whatever gets out of the grooves of cherished habit and established custom among men, must wait long and patiently, and be subjected to many a strain, before it can move on smoothly and without friction. For more than forty years after the United States adopted the decimal system in our coinage and moneys of account, *shillings* and *pence*, with all their inconveniences, could not be forced out of use, and even now are terms sometimes heard among the small traders and shopkeepers.

The Earl of Stirling's coinage had at least the infelicity of employing old terms with a new meaning; the change was irritating and vexatious, far

more so than would be possible at the present time, reaching as it did, every person in the kingdom, who had the means of buying a loaf of bread or a horn of beer. This alone could not fail to render these coins distasteful and obnoxious to the whole population.

But the more active cause of their unpopularity may be found in the hostility of the Scotch people generally to the arbitrary and despotic government of Charles I., under whose authority they were emitted.

The year 1637 was the crisis in Scotland of this monarch's fate. He had attempted, under the inspiring influence of the narrow and bigoted Laud, to impose upon the Scotch, without their consent, a mode of worship, that should be uniform, or nearly so, with that of England. A book of common prayer for Scotland was accordingly prepared, attached to which was a version of the Psalms into metre, which had been partly executed by King James, but revised and completed by the Earl of Stirling, and as a remuneration of his services, as editor and author, a copyright was granted to him for twenty-one years. His pecuniary interests and his ambition as a poet, were accordingly both involved in the successful introduction of this Service-book. And when the King sent out a proclamation resting solely on the authority of his royal prerogative, requiring the use of the book in all the churches of Scotland, if by the magic of his kingly power he had kindled volcanic fires beneath the surface of that entire kingdom, he could hardly have thrown the whole population into a more violent state of excitement. The public worship was interrupted, the clergy were assaulted, even missiles were hurled at them when performing their most sacred offices, and nowhere was the new service permitted to be used. From this time onward, the King and all associated with him, were hated and mistrusted by the bulk of the Scottish people. It was not possible for anything that fell within the domain of the royal prerogative, to be regarded with friendliness or indulgence. The Earl of Stirling's connection with the Service-book and the coinage, was of this character, and he shared the popular distrust and disapprobation. The

wits of the day were ready with their keenest weapons; and burlesques and satires and lampoons were employed to exhilarate the hearts of the people, and mould them at the same time into a permanent hatred of the royal cause. The Earl of Stirling had placed upon his palatial house, erected in 1632, at Stirling, and still standing, a monument both of his ambition and of his taste, his family arms, with the motto, *Per mare per terras.* This was travestied into *Per metres per turners*, with the implication, that the house had been erected from the anticipated proceeds of the coinage and the metrical version of the Psalms, both of which, as we have seen, were, directly or indirectly, subjects of popular complaint.

An old chronicler of the times records that, in November, 1639, two years after the imposed Service-book had been successfully resisted, King Charles's turners, struck by the Earl of Stirling, were, by proclamation at the Cross of Edinburgh, cried down from "twa pennies to ane penny." The effect of this was to withdraw the obnoxious coins from circulation, indicating very clearly that prices had already, in the seven years that had elapsed since their introduction, adapted themselves, in some degree at least, to the new coinage. This proclamation was shortly recalled, "because," says the same authority, "there was no other money passing to make change."

But the irritation of the people had not yet reached its height, but was destined to go on, gathering new impulses and additional strength, until it came to its ultimate intensity in the King's tragical death.

In a few weeks after the recall of the proclamation "crying" down its value, the indignation of the people became so intense that they determined utterly to abandon the new coinage, and to have nothing to do with it whatever. "Now," says the annalist, "they would give nothing, penny nor halfpenny for King Charles's turners; but King James's turners only should pass. Whereby all change and trade was taken away through want of current money, because their slight turners was the only money almost passing through all Scotland." This absolute and total rejection of the legal coinage of the

country at any value whatever, renders it obvious, that the naturally warm blood of the Scots was now at a boiling heat, that reason was no longer on the throne, that passion had seized the sceptre, and was in triumphant and despotic command.

How long this restraint continued, we have not been able to determine; perhaps no record exists which can throw any light upon this point. Doubtless this coinage was not looked upon with favor for the next twenty years, or until the restoration of Charles II.

The issue of the Earl of Stirling's coins from the mint must have ceased in 1637, when the hostility of the Scots was aroused against the King by the imposition of the Service-book, which was about five years from the beginning of the issue in 1632. In 1634 an order was granted by the King for the coinage of 6,000 stone-weight of copper, as we have already stated, from which, it may be inferred that the 1,500 stone-weight previously ordered, had been nearly exhausted in the two years which had then elapsed, and it was proposed to continue the coinage at about the same rate annually. If then not far from 700 stone-weight was coined annually for five years, it would amount to about 49,000 pounds of copper. If this estimate approximates the truth, it will be easy to imagine the vast number of these coins that were thus thrown into circulation.

Specimens of the Stirling coinage are not at the present day common, nor indeed are they on the other hand of the greatest rarity. By the original order it was provided that only one fifteenth part of the copper should be made into the smallest pieces, and consequently, if this order was carried out, a much smaller number of the piece of eight grains was struck than of the others, but this would not probably, at this distance of time, affect their rarity to any perceptible degree. That the largest coin or the two penny piece was struck in the greatest number, may also be inferred from the proclamation at the Cross of Edinburgh, which cried down the "twa pennies to ane penny," while the smaller coins were not mentioned at all. Those that have come

down to us are probably of the number that were laid aside, near the time of their issue, by antiquaries, and more especially by the loyalists, who preserved and cherished these coins as mementoes of Charles I. The royal inscription and the imperial crown reminded the cavalier of the King whom he venerated and loved as his sovereign by a divine right, whose memory was more dear to him and more tenderly cherished because he had been snatched from the throne by a violent and tragical death.

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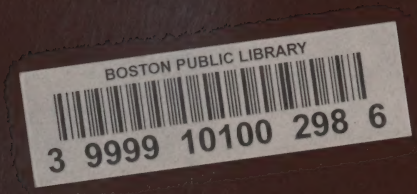
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